

City Council Special Called Meeting Transcript – 04/01/2021

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[10:02:48 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: This meeting, it is Thursday, April 1st, 2021. This is city council special called meeting. It is 10:02. We're convening this meeting via video conference. We have a quorum present. Colleagues, we have five items on the agenda, four on the regular agenda, one on an addendum. The four items are the personnel review-related ones for our four appointees. The additional item added was item number 5. It's my intent to call the speakers. I think we have two speakers that are signed up, and then to handle item number 5, and then when we're done with item 5 we'll go into executive session for items 1 to 4.

[10:03:50 AM]

Anticipating a lunch break from 12:00 to 1:00. So let's see how much we can get done. Is Kathie with us?

>> Tovo: Yes, mayor, I am, and I believe that at least one or more of my colleagues may not be able to be here for the first part of the meeting and so I would ask that we wait until we have a full dais before we vote on item 5. >> Mayor Adler: We can certainly do that. >> Tovo: Thanks. I am circulating a draft. We've gotten a flurry of emails related to this issue and so I'm circulating a draft right now that has a couple quick edits to it. In fact, Katie powers just now circulated it and so that should be in your box at 10:04. Thank you, Katie. >> Mayor Adler: Okay. So we'll call the speakers so that we get the speakers

[10:04:50 AM]

handled. Do you want us, Kathie, at that point to discuss the matter or do you want us to go into executive session and then come out later when we have a full dais to discuss -- full dais? >> Tovo: I'm going to check in and see when some others are planning on -- are able to get to our meeting today, but thanks for the question. >> Mayor Adler: Okay. Why don't you take a look at that and I'll ask that question when we're done with the speakers. We just have two, so it won't be a long time. Yes, Ann Morgan. >> I was just going to suggest calling the meeting to order. >> Mayor Adler: I thought I had. Calling today's meeting to order, Thursday, April 1st we have a quorum present. The time was 10:02, it's 10:05, being held video conference. And we have five items on the agenda. I didn't do that before, I'm doing it now.

[10:05:52 AM]

Clerk, do you want to invite the couple speakers we have to speak to us? >> Yes, mayor. The first speaker will be Carol Guthrie. >> Good morning, council, mayor and council. Can you hear me? >> Mayor Adler: Yes. >> Okay, wonderful. Thank you. I am asking for your support on item 5. We are concerned about the safety of the employees as well as the safety of the general public. And so we want to make sure that the city is doing its due diligence before we open the city to the public. And we want to give all employees an opportunity to get vaccinated before they start seeing the public. I think if you were to look

[10:06:53 AM]

at the reintegration plan from development services, they have an outstanding plan. It's fabulous. It allows the employees an opportunity to plan on how they are going to deal with their children. It allows all of the workers to get acclimated back into their workplace, and it also allows for a one-time opening to the general public. Our concern of opening too early is that people could potentially get exposed, and then we would have to close the library again. And so our hope is that you will support item 5, protect the public, protect your employees and just do the right thing. And we think being safe is the right thing. So we hope we can count on your support. Thank you so much.

[10:07:58 AM]

>> The next speaker is Zenobia Joseph. >> Thank you, mayor, councilmembers. I'm Zenobia Joseph. I just had a few recommendations and wanted to comment specifically as relates to the employee reintegrate plan memorandum. If you could please tell the public what the date is for the city manager's memo and where that would be posted. As relates to returning to the workplace, I'm referring to the second whereas which specifies long-term operational and telework plans. To the extent you plan to continue virtual meetings with the public, I would just recommend that you update your policy so that the public

can register same day, just like Texas legislature is doing statewide, as we speak. The text goes on to mention that some departments have opted to fully reopen public space and facilities in June of 2021 and others in May of 2021. I would just ask that you create some type of simple chart that has the major or

[10:09:01 AM]

critical city operations and post it on atxn. One where that static screen is and maybe hyperlink to instruct people to go to 311. My own personal experience, last Thursday, as you are aware, I testified from city hall and had some ditch consult I calling. There was a lawyer that answered the number I was given by the clerk. I went by the clerk's door but it said by appointment only. My only resource was go to security and ask for public, but I obviously don't know which city departments are open, who is answering the phone during the day, who requires phone or appointments in advance or if you could clarify that for the public, it would be helpful. And information technology, to the extent we continue these virtual meetings, there needs to be some way 311 to contact a staff

[10:10:02 AM]

member. I have tried many times and they just go through the list, but they mainly see email addresses, they don't see a phone number to reach anyone. Next I'll ask you to be transparent with the virtual meetings. I did send you an email I received from a commissioner, March 10, 2021, dated -- and it basically just said Zenobia, we got an email saying not to share the code. I lot our meeting was a live stream. Text me if it isn't. That's the instruction the city clerk has provided to the commissioners and the staff at relates to transparency on the 16th, there was a meeting between the equity officer and -- or equity staff and the bicycle committee. And that information was transparently posted with a code online, no advance sign-up or anything, and I would just ask you to take that into consideration when you go in executive session and discuss that. The clerk's performance on item 2.

[10:11:03 AM]

[Buzzer sounding] Please come comply with the Texas open meetings act, government code 51. If you have any questions, I'll gladly answer them at this time. >> Tovo: Mayor, I had a quick question. >> Mayor Adler: Yes. >> Tovo: I think you were asking for a city manager memo. Was that the one about the reintegration of the workplace? >> Yes, councilmember. Actually specifies the city manager's memo, employee reintegrate plan memorandum is how it's referenced, but there's no date and I'm not sure if that was an internal memo or something we should be able to access online. >> Tovo: Got it. I think we've gotten a few communications now from the city manager and from human resources, but I will --

I'll see if I can get that emailed to you. But I take your point. Not all memos are posted on the website, but if you are

[10:12:03 AM]

interested in seeing it, I would be glad to try to find it in my data control inbox and forward it to you. Thanks for your testimony. >> I appreciate that, councilmember. I'll just lastly say one of the issues with the virtual meetings, I know you posted the drafts, I sent you that email yesterday, and you sent the updates, but by the time update and lace backup are post 9, the public cannot register, it's too late for us, so it's a double standard. I would ask you to consider that as well. Thanks for your assistance in the past and thank you today. With that, I'll just sign off unless anybody else has a question for me. >> Mayor Adler: Ms. Joseph. Thank you. Councilmember pool. >> You're welcome. >> Pool: I would like to let Ms. Joseph know we got another memo this morning around 9:00, and I think that's what councilmember tovo was referring to about the latest new information, but in there is some

[10:13:05 AM]

additional specific information that may be helpful to you and actually to everybody. Thanks. >> You can send it, I appreciate it, thank you so much. >> Mayor Adler: Thank you. So -- thank you. The question before us right now is, Kathie, do we let you lay this out? Do we have the manager and staff respond to it? Or do we go into executive session until we have more complete dais. We have -- we're missing councilmember alter, who I think will be arriving about 10:45. >> Tovo: Mayor, I think I would like to wait for councilmember alter. >> Mayor Adler: Okay. That being the case then, since it's just us and we have control over our time, let's go into executive session and we'll come back out.

[10:14:06 AM]

We're going to go into executive session to bring up four items, pursuant to 551.074 of the government code, we're going to discuss personnel matters related to the city manager, city clerk, city auditor, municipal court clerk. Those are items 1 through 4. And without objection, I'll see you all in executive session and we'll talk about the schedule for the day in executive session and then we'll report that back out to the clerk for people that are watching or trying to judge time. See you all in executive session.
[Executive session]

[11:11:52 AM]

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[Music].

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[Music]. [Music].

[3:45:26 PM]

>> Mayor Adler: It's 3:45. Today is April 1, 2021. While we were in closed session, we were discussing personnel matters related to items 1, 2, 3 and 4. We've finished the conversation of 2, 3, 4. When we're done with item 5, we'll go back into executive session. Manager, if you come back in with us and we can all be together. At this point, I agree -- this is going to pause the tape and come back. So we're going to consider item 5. This is an item from council from councilmember tovo. Councilmember tovo, do you want to make your motion? We'll get a second and you ask discuss it. And get the manager to respond.

>> Tovo: Yes. Thank you. I would like to move

[3:46:27 PM]

approval of the version that Katie circulated this morning which included a couple edits to reflect some of the information we received this morning from the city -- from the human resources department. >>

Mayor Adler: Councilmember tovo has moved item number 5, version 2. Councilmember pool seconds the motion. Councilmember tovo. >> Tovo: >> Tovo: Thank you, mayor. I want to thank all departments for planning for the safe transition back of their staff. I think as a city we have really been a model for the rest of the community about how we keep our city employees safe and still continue those critical

services that our constituents depend on and that our residents depend on and with regard to the library, I really appreciate the way that the public

[3:47:28 PM]

library has maintained that balance of providing a level of service while also prioritizing the health and safety of its employees. We are now in a situation, as the resolution states, we are all individuals even 16 are now able to -- are now eligible for the vaccine, however, we don't yet -- we're not yet in a situation where all of our city employees have had time to get the vaccine. And so I know the plans have evolved a bit at the public library in the last couple of days since this resolution was posted, but the concern remains that public library staff would be asked to report back to work on Monday, April 5th, as a time where many of them likely have not received the vaccine or if they have received the vaccine, they've just received one of two and they are not past the immunity that takes effect after the second

[3:48:29 PM]

vaccine. In light of that, this would push back -- push back the proposed employee re-entry plan just for the public library. We did hear from some other departments that are in slightly different situations. But this would still allow -- still allow them to, as I understand their plan as it's now been articulated involves opening up 11 branch libraries on the 11th of May, and then opening up branches by June 28th. And I still -- we can certainly have that conversation. I think it's still possible for that to happen but in any case the employees themselves who themselves could constitute, you know, a large -- a fairly large body would be not reporting back to work on Monday. >> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Manager, do you want to respond to this? >> Sure. Thank you, mayor and council. As you know, the health and

[3:49:31 PM]

safety of our employees and communities and families is top priority. This has been true throughout the pandemic and we take that very seriously. As your manager who is responsible for the safety of our employees, I take that incredibly seriously and that has always been top of mind. As the councilmember mentioned, each department is unique and will have different needs, so we have had departments and thousands of employees working throughout this pandemic in the field in safe environments through the protocols that we put in place. We continued to look for how we can make sure as we need to be nimble and responsive to the community's needs that we put into place those protocols to keep the safety of our employees top of mind. As was mentioned, there was a memo that was put out this morning by our interim assistant city manager Shannon Jones and director of human resources to describe some of the factors that go into this decision.

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Including the need to open our libraries so the public can access some critical resources that are needed to access vaccines and other federal dollars and grants and programs that would be important during this very critical time. These are public services. We provide those public services for our constituents, and we take that incredibly seriously as well. We're always trying to find that balance and the plan we have put forward we believe does provide that balance. I'll turn it over to director of human resources to provide additional context, but we also have our assistant director from human resources Karen Heyward to talk about vaccine distribution for employees and director of public libraries Roosevelt weeks to talk about the implementation plan for his staff. >> Thank you so much, Spencer and council. As communicated in the memorandum in the beginning sections, the hrd department has been working closely

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with Austin public health to ensure that we have a timely response in giving vaccinations for employees. As a reminder, we started in December asking the departments to determine when would be the most appropriate time to reintegrate staff. Most of our departments are reintegrating in stages, only requiring in their phase 1 both department employees that are critical to the work that needs to be done as we begin to have higher expectations to meet community demands. And so it's not just exclusive to APL. All of our departments who have front-facing employees are working for phased in approaches that begin in April. We want to remind you that as a city we purchased 6,000 vaccinations last year hoping to stay ahead. Those vaccinations, we've only received about 300 of them. Our plan is our collaboration with the department of public health to make sure until the ones we receive come in that we're able to address the needs of employees.

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Last week we sent out a memorandum to our key departments that have front-facing employees to prioritize those departments in ensuring the staff who have not had an opportunity to receive those vaccines had an opportunity to do so. With the opening of the eligibility that began on Monday, on Friday of last week we sent communications to our departments saying because of the now increased eligibility for the vaccines, we are increasing our opportunities to provide them. As we work with public health, we are working on days they are not working directly with the public so we could pre or ties our employees. We placed our clinic in the south part of town to address operational teams. We are very grateful to continue to collaborate with public health until the city continues to receive the performed vaccinations. When we receive those, we'll be doing more

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walk-ins. We did 120 last week and we're waiting for more of those so we can create more convenience to our employees in receiving them. We're going to do the same for flu shots in creating the clinics. As soon as we receive those purchased shots, you will see more of a convenient way for employees to receive them. But I'm sure you can appreciate in light of the need to get employees back to work, we worked with aph to try to solidify vaccinations to ensure that happens. I want to make council aware of the fact the same thing that happens with flu vaccinations, we don't know if employees will take us up on the opportunity. They are not required to let us know about vaccinations, at this stage they are not required to take it. Yes, there's opportunities to continue to allow employees to receive the vaccination, but we also recognize that we will be integrating into the workforce without every employee being required to take that vaccination. And so that is a portion of it which is why every department had to create a

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safety plan that was approved by the health department prior to opening up. And so we worked with aph to ensure that every department's safety plan allows us the opportunity to provide safety in case their employees who make a personal selection not to get the vaccinations. To date between our 1a, 1b and 1c employees and now all employee, we've vaccinated over 3400 employees at this point. This morning when I sent out the message, we were about 400 based on the communication that we put out. We're about 576 in the last six hours. And so we're optimistic as every day comes we're able to do that. I know some council offices have some concerns about the complexity of registering through the city with the notion it will be just as complex as some of the processes that the public has had to go through. So when an employee applies, they submit the paperwork and send an email to the email address hrd has

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provided. Once we receive that, we put them on a list and call them as employees to schedule. So the process is a little bit different. We are making sure that every employee that submits has the opportunity to receive the vaccination, and again, as we get vaccination spots, we will create more opportunities for walk-ins and we sent an email out to departments last week asking to focus on those employees without computer access to make sure we prioritize them first in the scheduling of the vaccinations. And so at this time just to make sure you are clear about what the vaccination process looks like, I will turn it over to Karen Heyward who will walk thousand how we've partnered with public health and our success. >> Mayor? >> Mayor, you are muted.

[3:56:39 PM]

>> Mayor Adler: Kathie, were you raising your hand? >> Tovo: I was. I am very interested what our process the going to be like for vaccination for city staff and how that looks, but I know we're short on time as we still have the manager's evaluation before us. I'm wondering, I think the point of the resolution really gets to the fact we have a city department that is asking hundreds of its employees to report back to work Monday and many of those hundreds, even if they have received one vaccination will not be at a point where they are immune yet. I wonder if we could get this presentation as part of our covid presentation on Tuesday and sort of focus on the resolution at the moment. >> If I could, councilmember tovo, I would point out that there are other departments who have plans that require employees to return to work in April for their phase 1

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approach with safety plans. So I just wanted to make sure we are aware APL is not the only department who has gone through this process, created those safety and asking employees to come back doing critical work prior to a gain then they've all had the opportunity for employee vaccinations. >> Mayor Adler: Okay. I think the point is well taken. Focus as much as you can on the operative issues that are associated with this resolution. But I don't want to limit you in terms of what you think is relevant to that question. >> Mayor and council, I would like to offer director weeks just a chance to talk about the operational plans and why and the thoughtfulness that went into it and the reasons it was laid out this way. Director weeks? >> Mayor Adler: You are muted, sir.

[3:58:40 PM]

>> Mayor, council, we have been working through this process since the start of the pandemic, or putting a plan in place when we're coming back. We made adjustments to that plan, whenever we get a notice from city manager stay-at-home orders. This has been a living document for us. One of the things that I would like for you all to know is that we have about 225 of our employees right now that are working in our facilities, providing services. We had probably 125 of those that have not stopped working since the pandemic started. So what we're asking our staff to do is to start coming back, to prepare to provide services to the public. And many council members have gotten correspondence from the citizens about the need to open our libraries, specifically for computer access. And I'm out in the community quite frequently, and I hear it

[3:59:41 PM]

all the time. But I always look at how we can make sure our staff is safe, make sure that they provide the service that we need for them to provide, in a safe environment, as best as we can. We put those measures in place since the summer of last year, with some enhanced things that we've done this year by providing itemization in the H vac vac systems in all of our facilities. These are systems in hospitals, private businesses, so we're going above and beyond to make sure that our staff is safe. And so one of the tough things for us as library is people come to rely upon us to provide those critical services in emergencies. The pandemic is just one of those emergencies when we have flooding, when we have hurricanes, things of that nature. People come to the library for those support services. And with them asking us for that, it's critical for us to provide these services.

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And the main folks that are impacted are the low-income black and brown folks in our community, the elderly in our community. Those are the ones impacted the most. So as a library, we want to make sure we can provide those services to them, because they look to us to provide those services. And most of the things that we're asking our citizens to do is to go online, fill out the application to sign up for a vaccination, if you want unemployment, you cannot go into the unemployment office, you've got to do this stuff online. Those folks rely on us to do that. Our plan is to ask our staff to come back to join the rest of the team, so that we can prepare to open to the public. We have 20 locations we should be opening, but we know the staffing situation that's dealing with childcare, that's dealing with health issues and things of that nature. So we minimize bringing back those folks that will be exposed

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to the public in a significant way. And when we do open our facilities to provide browsing and computer access, there will be very limited contact with those individuals. And right now it's the same thing when we're doing our curbside services. There is limited contact, so staff is safe as well as our customers. So I think this is a good time, if any, to start bringing our staff back three weeks in advance of us opening to the public so they can get reenergized with what they have to do, to know, you know, what we're doing, how we're going to interact with the public and how to address the situation when they come up. So, you know, our goal is to bring them back this Monday, start providing services on the 10th of May. So I think we're in a good position to be able to make sure they're safe and our customers are safe.

[4:02:48 PM]

>> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Manager, anything else? >> I would be happy to answer any questions. >> Mayor Adler: Colleagues? Yes, Vanessa? Councilmember Fuentes. >> Fuentes: Yes. Director weeks, of the 1 libraries that be scheduled to open on the 10th as part of the plan, where are those located, generally? Are they in the eastern crescent? >> They're all across our city. We want to make sure we can provide those services all through the city. They are spread throughout the city. There are several in the eastern crescent that will be open. >> Mayor Adler: Councilmember tovo? >> Tovo: Mr. Weeks, I have a couple of follow-up questions. As I understand the 11 libraries that would be opening on the 10th, are all providing curbside

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books, correct? Right now? >> Correct. >> Tovo: And again, I want to commend the city staff as a very frequent public library user through the years, I really appreciate our public libraries and I appreciate you making that curbside service available. And doing so, I know councilmember kitchen and councilmember alter and possibly others and I were in a conversation with you early on in the pandemic, about how -- about the work that you were doing with Austin public health to make sure those environments stayed safe, because as I recall there were cases of transmission among library staff, and significant concerns. So I appreciate that you worked with public health to make sure those environments stayed safe when that went on, and that they were able to provide that continuing service to the public. So how many employees are currently working at those 11 branches? >> Right now, including our

[4:04:49 PM]

central staff, we have about 200 employees that are on-site. >> Tovo: Okay. That is more than I remembered. But I guess the -- you know, as I looked at some of the other departments' reintegration plans, just as a note, my resolution does ask, manager, for information about how the -- what the other departments' final integration plans are. So that we can get a sense of that. But I do know many departments are doing it in phases, bringing employees back in phases. Phasing employees through the summer, I believe. And so again, with consideration for the fact that the branches themselves will not -- those 11 branches will not be opening until may 10, in my estimation it is a simple course of action to allow those employees to go ahead and get their vaccinations, become immune, and not ask everyone to come back on Monday. I think June 28th, as I recall,

[4:05:50 PM]

is the date that was specified for the other branches to open. I don't know that I have any more questions. At least at this point. >> Yeah, we're bringing our staff back in phases as well. 25% of our staff

will still be working from home. The critical need right now is to have our public basing staff come in and provide those computer access and in-house browsing. And as I stated, we've had about 200 of our employees that's been working the whole time, at least since June of last year. And they have been providing those services. >> Tovo: Yeah. Again, the resolution is not asking for a delay on your opening on the 10th, it's asking that you not ask your staff to report back on Monday. And I think it's especially important as we're going to have people accessing the limited facilities, that as many of our employees be vaccinated as possible, and as healthy as

[4:06:50 PM]

possible. And so I think that's -- >> Mayor Adler: I have a quick question. You know, on these kinds of things, I mean, my history on this council is to err on the side of letting the manager manage, and not to reach down at that level and interfere. Or impact that. And I recognize that there's this department, you know, we just had conversations about the court, municipal court, which continues to function in some level. And I don't know if this is something that we're opening up the door for us to be making kind of a management opening decision for multiple departments, and I'm not sure that that's really the role of the council.

[4:07:50 PM]

And I know that each one of the departments are making decisions based on their employees and their practices and what the interactions are, and the like. This is also kind of uncharted territory for us, and employees working has become a larger issue, in a lot of other contexts. I think it's very important that the libraries are important. I think the libraries provide an in-person function that in many instances is as important as the courts and the like, for people to be able to get to that. But this is like the first time out, and we want our employees to get vaccinated, and I'm trying to figure out the tradeoffs here. The question I would have is, if the goal is to get outward facing by mid-may, does this interfere with -- can you still get the libraries open by

[4:08:52 PM]

mid-may if employees don't show up until may 7th? Is there a day later than April 7th that gives people a couple weeks' notice to be able to get vaccinated? I don't know how much notice they've already had with respect to that, but I know the threshold just changed in terms of getting vaccinations. To conclude, I'm loath to go into an area, to step in to manage. I'm asking as with councilmember tovo, it's restricted in that you can still open at or near the time that you wanted to open public facing. >> Let me -- thank you, mayor. One of the things that has been very tough, and I think all of you leaders

understand that, this has been a tough environment to manage. Because you have so many different employees with

[4:09:53 PM]

different situations, and conditions. And what we've tried to do is to manage those expectations. We communicated on a regular basis with our staff, whether it's direct chat or sitting down at a table to talk to them. The thing that kept coming up for me dealing with the staff members, our essential employees didn't stop working in March. And why must we do this was the biggest concern. When in June we opened up to curbside services, those providing curbside services, they were like, why must we be out there doing this. So you're hearing this from your staff and they're saying, why can the people at home can't come help out, and why can't we do this or that. It's a big morale issue in leading the staff to provide customer service and making sure they feel appreciated at the same time. That's one of the big selling that we have. The reason we've given this

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timeline, three weeks ahead of time, so they get reacclimated to being in the building, knowing what they have to do, reacclimate themselves to the safety protocols we put in place. That is the reason we wanted to started now. If we say come back on, let's say the first week in may, I still want us to be able to provide those -- have them provide services on the 10th. Because there's a desperate need right now for folks to get these vaccinations, to have access to computers. And so I would like for them to have the opportunity to reacclimate themselves to the environment, than to give them one week to reacclimate themselves to the environment. >> Mayor Adler: Councilmember kitchen? >> Kitchen: Yes, I hear what you're asking, mayor, and hearing the concerns you're raising with regard to managing the staff, Mr. Weeks. But I would say in this

[4:12:00 PM]

scenari -- and I would agree that normally I would not be thinking of substituting our judgment for management's judgment, because that's not our job, but I don't see that as the issue in front of us. I see this more as a policy issue, because it relates to covid, and relates to public health. And we've had to make a whole range of policy issues related to protecting the public. And I think this is also relating to the staff. It would seem to me that we can still -- a decision by the council that's a policy decision related to delaying the time that employees have to come back, in order to allow them that time to get their vaccinations, I think that that still works, with the objective to open those libraries at the time that [lost audio].

[4:13:04 PM]

>> Mayor Adler: Oops. It looks like we lost Ann. We'll come back to her. Greg? >> Casar: Dr. Weeks, I didn't see in the memo from director Hayes the list of the 11 libraries opening. I don't know if I missed it, or should look for a memo from you. >> Kitchen: Mayor, can you hear me? >> Mayor Adler: Yes, we lost you there for a second. Can you hang on for a second, Greg? Ann, do you want to conclude? >> Kitchen: Yeah, my conclusion is, I think it's inappropriate in this circumstance to make a policy decision, so I will be -- I won't be supporting the resolution, I see it as a policy decision the council needs to make around protecting our staff. I don't see that as counter to what management is trying to O.D. I understand the challenges for management. But I do see that the library

[4:14:04 PM]

still being able to be opened on the target date. So I think while normally -- I do not believe it's our role to make management decisions, I see this as a policy decision along with many other policy decisions we've made around protecting public health. >> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember Casar? >> Casar: I have two questions. The first one was, director weeks, do you have in that list of 11, would you mind reading those out for us, just so we know? >> Yes. That's manshack, old quarry, university hills, oak hill, will LI may Kirk, north village, carver, Ruiz, spicewood springs, Yarbrough and central. >> Casar: Thank you. That's useful to know.

[4:15:06 PM]

Probably separate from this conversation might be good for us to -- off the top of my head, and folks can correct me if I'm wrong, because that was a quick list, some of the sort of most hard-hit zip codes that are still lowest on vaccination rates don't pop out at me from that list. Especially, you know, southeast and northeast. Obviously university hills is close to some of that, but not exactly. Of course, I'm not saying that we shouldn't open university hills or prioritize it, but let's just -- let's circle back. That might be a conversation to be had. Because if part of the reason for accelerating some of this into mid-may, is to find places with the least internet access, and lowest vaccination rates. My understanding of the [lapse in audio] And lowest vaccination rates are oftentimes not near a majority of the libraries that you've listed. Again, I don't want this to be

[4:16:07 PM]

interpreted as me saying that we shouldn't open libraries, you know, have support across the city, I don't want to be misunderstood that way. But if part of the point is to get to some of the places with least internet access, I don't know if that list quite hits that goal as far as -- >> One of the things we have -- that we've done to help out with this pandemic is we opened our libraries to be used by public health to give out the shots -- not the shots, but the testing. That's at southeast right now, in the dove springs area, and also little walnut, but they since disbanded. But we've also expanded our testing sites to other libraries within our system when UT continued to do that work. We work with different entities to make sure that those folks that need support from public health standpoint, they have it. It's in the community.

[4:17:07 PM]

>> Casar: Understood. And I would understand why we wouldn't be at southeast or little walnut, for example if we were still doing tests there. It would be great if we plan on doing tests or vaccinations or something there, and that would make more direct sense. But again, I don't think the conversation here is specifically which libraries to open, but I think this flags for me a question about where we're going first. Because if there are going to be some employees that we say, this is really important because there are communities that don't have internet, and don't have access to the vaccine, that's why it's important for you to go, I would really like for us to be able to truly back that up, and say, we're really going to those communities and prioritizing there. >> And I think if you look at the list, I think that we do hit the majority of those that we've identified in the eastern crescent area. Ruiz, which is in Riverside area. I think we've hit a lot of those

[4:18:07 PM]

locations to make sure that we can help those folks that really truly need access. >> Casar: Understood. >> In addition to that -- if I may. In addition to that, what we've done is we've loaned out laptops, hotspots in our housing communities, for schools. We're trying to make sure that people have access. And what we've identified, and Mont of the council recognizes, there's a digital divide. We're trying to do as much as we can to make sure people can have access to whatever they need to have access to. >> Casar: And director weeks, sorry, sometimes with internet stuff, we get on top of each other by accident and I think we kept filling in each other's gaps. I really appreciate, and we've worked with your staff and the community on the hotspots and laptop delivery and all that, which I really deeply appreciate. And there's need around Ruiz and university hills, so I don't want to downplay that. Again, my understanding, though,

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of some of the places with the highest covid rates, the lowest vaccination rates, are 4-4, and 5-3. Are just at the very top of that list of meeting highest covid and lowest vaccination. It's a shame those two coincide in our city. Again, just -- I'm not wanting to say anything we've done hasn't been good. The work the library staff has done has been very important, it's just when we have staff coming back, and we're saying it's for a certain reason and certain purposes, I've gotten questions from APL staff who have said, hey, if I'm going to go back to try to help places with the greatest digital divide and greatest vaccine needs, then my library or these areas I've worked in might need help sooner. So I just want to say that out

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loud. But even though it may not be entirely what is being dictated by this resolution. The second question goes back to the mayor and councilmember tovo's point. So is there -- there's the acclimation process of being in-person for awhile before may, but is there anything else that -- but otherwise, other than that, if we pass this resolution as it's worded, would libraries still open at the same timeline? Will they still be able to open still in mid-may, but it would just mean less acclimation for staff? >> That's what I really want us to be able to do, provide that access to our customers on may 10th. They're already losing a lot of time right now because the vaccinations are available to everybody on Friday of last

[4:21:09 PM]

week. It's our hope we can get these folks in here so they can get their vaccinations, or sign up for them as least. >> Casar: Thank you, director. So to be clear, the resolution as worded, we would still get libraries open at the same timeline, but we would lose some of the acclimation time, is that right? >> That's exactly right. That's exactly right. >> Casar: Thank you, director weeks. And my last question, when you said that the vaccine was available to everybody as of last Friday, you mean that -- >> To sign up. >> Casar: Or is it that everybody at APL has been offered a slot for a vaccine? >> The hr department, I think, joy and her team are making sure that our team, the library was slotted as ones those departments to get the vaccine first. >> That's correct. We're trying to prioritize all of our front-facing employees with the shots that we have available now. And so Austin public library is one of our several departments where we're trying to mark

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those employees and get them vaccinated. >> Casar: To get something clear, though, when we say as of Friday, all of the front-facing APL staff would get a vaccine, does that mean they're eligible and we're working on it, or is it that we actually have enough slots for them? >> I think it was a mixture of both.

Because the governor opened up this Monday, everybody that's 18 and older, it provided us a new opportunity to allow people who did not have the ability to do it. So there is an Austin public library staff member 18 years or older, they can register now, and we allotted more shots than we got people signed up to cover that. Our goal is to continue to make shots available for city employees, including APL, who are 18 or older, who would like to receive the vaccination. >> Casar: Got it. So we still have slots open for

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APL employees if they sign up now through you. >> Yes, we do. >> Casar: That's great. The point is, you not sure if people start taking up all those slots, if there will be enough for everyone, but right now there's still opportunity for people who want it? >> Yes. >> Casar: Okay. Thank you. So it isn't necessarily guaranteeing everyone who wants one can have one starting today, but there's still availability for people who do? >> We have shots coming weekly, that we've identified. And we're not at a point right now where we have the shots that are so full, that I'm going to say we're going to run out. We've got about 500 signed up for this week, and we've had well over 1,000 earmarked just for employees. We've now reached out to all of the employees to say, if you would like to register, you can. And when we receive those registrations, if they work for any of our front-facing departments, we will put them at the first of the line so we continue to prioritize those front-facing employees across the city. >> Casar: That's a great psa,

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director Hayes, and director weeks, for all of our city employees watching. Please do sign up to get your vaccines to protect yourself and the rest of the community. They're available. So thank you. >> I think I was next. I wanted to ask, again, director weeks, did you say about 200, 220 employees in the library system in your department? >> That are working right now. We have a total of about 450 staff members. >> And how many of them have achieved the immunity from getting the second dose? Do you know? >> We don't know. We don't ask our staff for that. And it's up to them whether they provide it or not. >> Okay. Here's the thing. It sounds to me like in order to be safe and while we're waiting for everybody -- and I don't know, maybe we should talk about the fact that we need to give more than encouragement to our staff to get the vaccination, those who have already been

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vaccinated, can we prioritize those folks who are going to be in the public-facing positions until the rest of the core is also -- also gets the vaccinations and gets to the immunity -- can we use the people who are already ready to go? Like I've had both of my vaccinations, and it's been more than two weeks. So I

could be -- can we prioritize putting them [lapse in audio]? >> I don't know how to -- >> If I can answer that. Because these vaccinations are voluntary and we treat this as a medical situation, we are -- [overlapping speakers]. >> I understand that. I'm just asking, if we put out a call to say, we have this competing -- we have competing public policy issues, we have the need to get the libraries open, we have the need to protect our employees, those employees who feel comfortable with their level of inoculation and immunity, if they would be

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willing to volunteer to help us out in this first two-week period so we can, you know, lift the entire department forward? I'm not going to tell you guys how to do your operations, but if I was trying to solve this personnel issue, that's something I would consider. We've got competing purposes here. I think there's a way to meet both of them. It's a time and access concern. But I bet you, you've got staff who would voluntarily step up and fill that gap, until the rest of the department was ready to go. >> Councilmember pool, that is a slippery slope in asking folks to volunteer to do that. I can tell you now, I know my staff and I know them well. Their thing is, what about taking the vaccination, and I choose not to step up? If I'm fully vaccinated and I

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say, I'm not going to volunteer to go in early, if I have the opportunity to stay at home, then I'm going to take that option. Then I have a staff member that have worked this thing since March of last year, why should they be -- they weren't given a choice. Those individuals that are providing curbside service right now, they were not given a choice. >> Pool: Were they considered essential? >> When you say essential, what do you mean? >> Pool: Essential, that the first level -- they were the first ones to get the vaccination, were the ones who were considered essential. >> The 75 staff members that we do have, they were given the opportunity to get a vaccination. The ones that are doing curbside services were not deemed essential based on the Paris criteria. So those folks -- they didn't volunteer, we asked them to come in, because we were offering a service that they need to

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provide. >> Pool: Okay. I'm going to leave it there. I think that there is a solution here. I recognize hipaa. I recognize personal policies, I recognize our mission and the need to be open. And I think at some point our employees are going to be making those decisions themselves. What I would say is, let's encourage them, G give them the context that we've got here, eventually we're all going to be back to work. >> Mayor Adler: Councilmember -- >> Pool: Just get through the interim piece. >> Mayor Adler: Councilmember Ellis, did you raise your hand? >> Ellis: I did. I was just wondering about the

reintegration plan. I wasn't sure if there was any investigation ability to them or what we should expect from that.

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I just wanted to ask for clarification from the city manager if they are indeed finalized, or would we get notified they were updated, or how would that work? >> Thank you for that question. As you know, we've been working with departments from the beginning of this pandemic on what would it look like to reintegrate. As the pandemic has evolved and as the needs of our community have evolved, those plans also evolved. So the word "Final" is somewhat arbitrary. We continue to make adjustments and tweak. So that would be part of the feedback that we would give to council saying, this is the current plan as we have it at this point in time, knowing that circumstances may change and we'll have to alter those plans. >> Ellis: I'm okay with that. So you're comfortable with that language, "Final" just knowing there is flexibility as time goes on? Or should it say current plans, or something of that nature?

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>> I think current plans would probably be more appropriate for what we would be able to respond to this resolution. >> Ellis: I see the sponsor has her hand up. I would be comfortable with current. I probably don't need to make that motion then. >> Mayor Adler: Kathie, are you comfortable with the current there? >> Tovo: I am. I was trying to say like current is really more accurate. And actually, I'm glad you raised that, councilmember Ellis. So I'm going to change final to current. The other change I neglected to make when I made my motion is in line 17, I'd like to remove the word fully. Again, for the - to be accurate. Because it was [lapse in audio] Their integration plan as it was laid out in the memo -- I can't tell if that's mine or somebody

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else's that's making lots and lots of echoing. >> Mayor Adler: If you're not speaking, mute please. I didn't hear which line. >> Tovo: Line 15, I'm removing the word fully. As I understand, the reintegration plan from the public library, it is that the curbside branches, the branches currently providing curbside would open on may 10th for browsing and internet. And then the rest of them won't open up until June 28th. Which was, again, part of my point about pushing back through a turn of the employees. I did have a last question for -- >> Mayor Adler: Before you move on, is there any objection to making the change to line 27, to current, and line 15, taking out fully? Hearing none, those changes are made to the motion in front of us. Councilmember tovo? >> Tovo: Given the conversation we just had with director Hayes about the fact that you can

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inquire as to staff's vaccination status, in the memo it talks about that on may 10th, with the 11 libraries opening, only staff that have been fully vaccinated will be engaged in public-facing interactions. How does -- how is that going to happen if you can't determine individuals' vaccination status? Or can you ask them to volunteer for that service? Or how is that going to be resolved? >> Julie, I'll have to have you answer this question. I'm not aware of being able to require those fully vaccinated to do -- to come back and put them on the front lines. >> In the information we provided council, Shannon and I put the memorandum together, and a portion of the APL information indicated on page 2, paragraph 2, that you would be asking and engaging staff to only do that

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if they were vaccinated. I do think we need to make a correction there. I think in those spaces in the city, and I want to remind you there are five other departments that are scheduled to return, in none of those spaces are we asking for any employee to voluntarily share information whether or not they've had the vaccination. Councilmember tovo, I will note there with that correction, there are some employees who are feeling a sense of harassment, and think it's a hostile working place when they discuss their personal feelings relative to whether or not the vaccine is something we want to do. I know beyond just the hipaa, is that we've seen some cultural interactions in the workplace that have created some conflict with the mere conversation of, is covid real or not, should we receive a vaccination or should we not. What we tried to do is create rules and policies relative to reintegration that simply just said, based on the critical need of the work, you must return, and each department who decides

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to do the phase-in return must have a safety plan. So I would note for your answer, councilmember tovo, we would not require anybody under any space to tell us whether or not they have a vaccine in order to be required to complete the functions of work that they're responsible for completing. >> Tovo: So in other words, in the e-mail -- so that line should just be struck? Only staff that have been fully vaccinated will be engaged in public's facing interactions? >> That's correct. >> Tovo: Thank you for that clarification. >> Mayor Adler: Colleagues, I want to go ahead and vote for this resolution because the director said he could get the staff out on the same may 10th deadline. I'm uncomfortable with my vote in favor of this because I think it's reaching into the management effort. I won't vote for any other kind of changes like this. Urging all employees to go out and get vaccinated. This is the first one of these that has come up.

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I'm only voting for this because I still think we can meet the objective with some less affirmation. But I want everyone in town to go ahead and get vaccinated. And I do believe that opening up businesses and certainly critical functions of the city has a lot of them, are important for us to be doing. And I think our staff is trying to weigh in those tradeoffs that are involved. But given the director's -- I believe he can still meet his deadline with this resolution, I'm going to vote in favor of it. Any further discussion?

Councilmember kitchen, and councilmember Renteria. >> Kitchen: Yes, I wanted to thank you, director weeks. I know you're working very hard to serve the public, and open up these libraries. I am also going to vote for it.

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I think the bottom line is that we can still reach the goal of opening up the libraries by the middle of may, while still reaching our public health goals related to our employees. And so thank you for bringing this forward. Councilmember tovo, I'll be supporting the resolution. >> Mayor Adler: Councilmember Renteria. >> Renteria: Yes. I am also going to be supporting this. I think it's a message that we're sending, that we're going to take up, you know, being extra careful, you know? To me, I'm really concerned that we're going to be forcing people that they know their healthcare needs. Mr. Weeks, what happens to a person if they get called in, and they feel like, you know, their health or their family's

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health is in -- what happens to those people if you call them back in, and they come out and say, well, I really can't come back, I'm afraid that -- I have a kid that has special needs, medical needs, and I just don't want to take that chance? What would happen to that person? >> Mr. Weeks, let me go ahead and answer. Those are kind of questions we'll handle on a case-by-case basis. I think this conversation demonstrates the complexity involved in the decisions that each department needs to make in our hr department, along with our lawyers, it will help every department director as they face those questions. >> Renteria: Okay. Thank you. >> Mayor Adler: Further discussion on this item before we vote? Councilmember tovo? >> Tovo: Just a couple of quick last things. First of all, I really am looking forward to that. I hope we can have that presentation about city vaccinations that we didn't have today, on Tuesday. And I think that is useful information. I hope we can revisit the conversation about whether

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employees can be asked. I think we've gotten slightly different information throughout this week about whether employees can be asked if they are vaccinated. I just saw an employee article that suggested otherwise as well. It would just be good to get clear on that point. Lastly, I want to again thank the public libraries. I haven't done curbside but I'm glad it exists, and I know the constituents across the city are appreciative of it. And I appreciate the staff at the 11 branch libraries who have provided that service through this pandemic, and am very glad that 11 of our libraries, I want to state clearly expectations for the public, that all the libraries are opening up than just the 11 at this point. But I do want to just say, I appreciate my colleagues in supporting this, as we move forward. I think it is very important that we listen to our workforce, and to their concerns, and when possible really accommodate those concerns, and do what's

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right for the public health and safety, both of our staff and of our users of these facilities. And so I appreciate that everyone from our hrd and all of our departments, and our manager, are keeping that at the forefront as well. And I appreciate the balance that has to be struck as we move forward. >> Mayor Adler: We'll take a vote. Those in favor of item 5 as amended, please raise your hand. Those opposed? Best as I can tell, it's unanimous vote of the council. Councilmember Casar, I see you now. >> Casar: Count me in. >> Mayor Adler: Got you in. So the item passes. >> Mayor, I think councilmember Kelly is off the dais. >> Mayor Adler: Thank you. Councilmember Kelly off the dais, the others voting aye. It passes. That said, colleagues, we're going to go back into executive session, where we had recessed.

[4:40:30 PM]

Here at 4:40 P.M. Pursuant to 55107 government code we can discuss item number 1, which is personnel matters relating to the city manager. I think I'll be the only one that comes back out to conclude the city council meeting at the end of that discussion. I'll see you all in executive session.

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>> Mayor Adler: Special called meeting here at 5:45 on April 1st, 2021. Thank you.

